



The Cleveland Museum of Art

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Contact: Greg Donley, 216/421-7340, ext. 263

PHOTOGRAPHS CREATE UNSETTLING VISION OF RURAL LIFE

(Cleveland, OH) The new exhibition **Andrea Modica Photographs: Treadwell** is on view at the Cleveland Museum of Art from May 30 to August 9, 1998. This exhibition of twenty-three 8 x 10-inch platinum-palladium contact prints combines selections from Modica's 1996 book, *Treadwell*, with more recent images made as her work has continued. Admission is free.

Critical assessments of Modica's *Treadwell* photographs are apt to begin with a phrase like "There is a real *Treadwell*." The world described through these images is not, however, a document of the geographical location in upstate New York, but a careful evocation of the mysterious relationships among its residents. Pulitzer prize-winning novelist E. Annie Proulx, in her introduction to the book, relates an enlightening discussion she had with the photographer:

The photographs do not illustrate the real *Treadwell* of Delaware County but offer us enigmatic and portentous moments of people in constricting rural circumstances in a late decade of this troubled century. Modica glances across the table at her box of platinum prints and says, "reliquaries." 'Reliquary' is a curious word to describe a photograph, for in its strict meaning a reliquary is a small box or casket in which one keeps or exhibits relics.

In a metaphorical sense, Proulx explains, that is exactly what these photographs are: containers of fragmentary material that is imbued with deep meaning and symbolism.

While the images appear intimate and spontaneous, Modica's working process is methodical and time-consuming. Using an 8 x 10-inch view camera and natural light, the photographer of necessity invades the spaces she photographs; the exposures necessary to make the negatives are many seconds long, and the close perspective of the images means her bulky camera and tripod are virtually on top of the subjects. The careful approach is evident in the consistent mood of the finished photographs. An atmosphere of brooding overcast and autumnal fatigue is everywhere, the aura of greyness is enhanced by the rich and subtle tones of her laboriously made platinum-palladium prints.

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A central figure is a person identified only as Barbara, a girl who grows from a cherubic age 6 to a seriously overweight 17 in these photographs, her growing self-consciousness painfully evident. Other scenes find children playing outside in the mud or carcasses of animals decaying at the edge of the woods.

Curator of Contemporary Art and Photography Tom Hinson, who organized the exhibition, makes an analogy: "As others have commented, Modica is something like William Faulkner—she creates a sense of a place not by depicting its physical reality, but through brilliant exploration of the psychology of a place's inhabitants. Her Treadwell, New York, like Faulkner's Jefferson County, Mississippi, exists in the imagination of the artist and audience, independent of the real place on the map."

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Born in Brooklyn in 1960, Modica earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the State University of New York (SUNY) at Purchase, in 1982 and an MFA from Yale in 1985. Among her numerous awards and honors have been a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Fulbright grant, and a grant from the Aaron Siskind Foundation. She has published widely and has participated in dozens of group exhibitions and more than 20 one-person shows. Her work is in the permanent collections of major institutions including the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, DC.

In 1986, she took a teaching job at SUNY's Oneonta, New York campus, where she still works. It was in this area, about 200 miles west of Manhattan, that she first encountered the way of life and people she depicts in the Treadwell photographs.

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